

DRAFT – FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY

September 27, 2013

Peter Murphy
Chairman, Fairfax County Planning Commission
12000 Government Center Parkway
Suite 330
Fairfax, VA 22035

Re: Recommendations of Route 28 South Special Study Work Group

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the Route 28 South Special Study Work Group (the “Work Group”), I am very pleased to offer the following comments. These comments are intended to provide insight and perspective on the substantive positions of the Work Group and of equal importance, the thought process and deliberation associated with the same. For context, the Work Group has spent well over two (2) years of time in this collective effort. The Work Group has listened carefully to the findings and recommendations of the County’s planning and transportation staff, and also received valuable input from landowners and other stakeholders in the Study Area.

The Work Group believes that there are certain unique attributes of the Study Area. Among them, its close proximity to Dulles Airport, a number of relatively recently well-designed and successful office and mixed-use developments that are not ready for redevelopment, environmental features worthy of protection, and existing stable residential neighborhoods. In view of these circumstances, while there needs to be some level of consistency in policy and planning decisions for the station sites in the Phase II Rail Corridor, we do not believe that a “one size fits all” approach is appropriate as the land use circumstances in this Study Area are different from those at other station sites.

Over the course of this process, we have had a very iterative and productive dialog with the County staff. While we have not always agreed initially on issues or positions, in virtually all instances the Work Group was able to arrive at a position that balanced the need for consistency with County policies with the unique attributes of the Study Area. That approach and consensus is reflected in the proposed revisions to the Comprehensive Plan language for the Study area.

As the Planning Commission begins its consideration of this important effort, I want to share with the Commission the core principles and philosophy that have guided the Work Group’s recommendation. To that end, please note the following:

- Our goal is to facilitate well designed near-term Transit Oriented Development in the Study Area. While we appreciate and respect the need for long-term planning, longer term objectives beyond the 2030 (?) study horizon need to be carefully balanced with the need and benefit associated with near-term transit oriented development.
- Recognizing that much of the Study Area is already developed and/or approved for development, achieving the desired higher density redevelopment requires that there be sufficient incentives for landowners to move away from existing entitlements and re-enter the land use process. We believe that encouraging owners to enter the land use process yields better outcomes for all stakeholders.
- The Study Area is currently home to a number of well-designed projects. The same collective attention to design should be reflected in the objectives for redevelopment. Notwithstanding some of the established quality, the Work Group believes that current and historic planning guidance has been proportionally weak on issues of design. We urge the Planning Commission and the Department of Planning and Zoning to develop urban design guidelines as soon as possible for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan.
- There are stable residential neighborhoods within and adjacent to the Study Area. New development and redevelopment must provide reasonable transitions to the existing neighborhoods.
- We support the Work Force Housing recommendations contained in the revised Plan language. The Work Group members were instrumental in working with Staff to develop the recommended sliding scale.
- There must be balance between the pedestrian and the automobile. There is a need to facilitate pedestrian connections between existing developments and the Metro Station. Future road infrastructure must be planned and designed of a location and scale that does not create barriers to pedestrian movements throughout the land unit.
- Planning for roads and infrastructure must recognize the developed nature of much of the land unit. To that end, while design standards for new roads and conceptual streets are appropriate, the same must not require the replacement of existing improvements.
- The Work Group supports the collective transportation objectives that are associated with a grid of streets. However, again, recognizing the presence of significant amounts of existing infrastructure, there needs to be reasonable flexibility in the location and configuration of a future grid so as to allow the grid to be tailored to the land planning on undeveloped or redeveloping parcels in the Study Area.

- The Work Group spent considerable time and energy evaluating the Comprehensive Plan recommendation for an additional bridge crossing over the DAAR/Toll Road to connect Sunrise Valley Drive in the Study Area to future transportation links on the north side of the DAAR/Toll Road. This crossing should be reflected in the Comprehensive Plan, but should not segregate the western end of the land unit from the transit station. Any future crossing will need to be designed so as not to become an impediment to pedestrian and other access to and from the rail station. Similarly, given the uncertainties related to timing and funding of the bridge, speculation on its design should not preclude or inhibit the approval of near-term transit oriented development that is otherwise consistent with the revised Comprehensive Plan.